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**APPLICATION
FOR
UNITED STATES
LETTERS PATENT**

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FOR: DLL CIRCUIT

DOCKET NO.: NEG-332US

DLL CIRCUIT

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001]

5 The present invention relates to a DLL (Delay Locked Loop) circuit. More specifically, the invention relates to the DLL circuit used for delaying a clock signal by a desired delay time to generate an internal clock signal used in the inside of a semiconductor device.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 [0002]

Semiconductor devices sometimes have a DLL circuit for delaying an external clock signal supplied from the outside of the semiconductor devices by a desired delay time to generate an internal clock signal. In a synchronous memory, for example, in order to output data in
15 synchronization with an external clock signal, the internal clock signal is generated from the external clock signal, and the timing of outputting the data is synchronized with the internal clock signal. In view of the delay time of a circuit for outputting the data, the internal clock signal is generated to have a phase so that the timing of outputting the data
20 from the synchronous memory matches the rise (or fall) timing of the external clock signal.

[0003]

Nonpatent Document 1 discloses a typical DLL circuit. Fig. 8 is a schematic diagram of a DLL circuit that is known. The known DLL
25 circuit includes an input buffer 101, a delay selection circuit 102, and a

delay synthesis circuit 103. The delay selection circuit 102 includes delay elements 104_1 to 104_N connected in series, where N is a natural number equal to or more than two, and a selector 105.

[0004]

5 An external clock signal CLK_{EX} supplied from an outside of the DLL circuit is input to the input terminal of the input buffer 101. The input buffer 101 reproduces the waveform of the external clock signal CLK_{EX} to generate a clock signal $CLK1$.

[0005]

10 The clock signal $CLK1$ is input to the input terminal of the delay element 104_1 in the first stage of the delay selection circuit 102. The delay elements 104_1 to 104_N connected in series delay clock signals input to the delay elements 104_1 to 104_N , respectively, and outputs clock signals T_1 to T_N from their output terminals, respectively. The delay
15 time of the clock signal T_p with respect to the internal clock signal $CLK1$, where p is a natural number equal to or less than N , is larger as p increases.

[0006]

The selector 105 selects two-clock signals $FDLO$ and $FDLE$
20 output from two adjacent delay elements from among the clock signals T_1 to T_N output from the output terminals of the delay elements 104_1 to 104_N , respectively. Of the clock signals $FDLO$ and $FDLE$, the clock signal $FDLE$ corresponds to the clock signal output from the delay element 104_{2q} in an even-numbered stage, while the clock signal $FDLO$
25 corresponds to the clock signal output from the delay element 104_{2q+1} in

an odd-numbered stage, where q is a natural number selected so that $2q + 1$ does not exceed N . The delay synthesis circuit 103 synthesizes the clock signals FDLO and FDLE to generate an internal clock signal CLK_{IN} . The delay synthesis circuit 102 further has a function of finely
5 adjusting its delay time.

[0007]

The delay time of the known DLL circuit is coarsely adjusted to be close to a desired value by adequately selecting two of the clock signals T_1 to T_N to generate the clock signals FDLO and FDLE. Further,
10 the delay time of the DLL circuit is accurately adjusted to the desired value by the operation of the delay synthesis circuit 103.

[0008]

One problem with the known DLL circuit is that the minimum delay time that can be achieved by the DLL circuit (which will be hereinafter simply referred to as the "minimum delay time") increases
15 when the number of the delay elements 104_1 to 104_N is increased so as to allow a wide range of adjustment of the delay time. As the number of the delay elements 104_1 to 104_N is increased, the number of input terminals of the selector 105 also increases. As is well known by a
20 person skilled in the art, as the number of the input terminals of the selector 105 increases, the delay time of the selector 105 increases with it. An increase in the delay time of the selector 105 would increase the minimum delay time of the DLL circuit. A large minimum delay time of the DLL circuit is not desirable since it hinders a faster operation of
25 the semiconductor device into which the DLL circuit is integrated.

[0009]

It is desirable for the DLL circuit to have a small minimum delay time. It is more preferable that the DLL circuit has the small minimum delay time while allowing the wide range of adjustment of the delay time.

[0010]

[Nonpatent Document 1]

Tatsuya Matano et al., "A 1Gb/s/pin 512Mb DDR2 SDRAM using a digital DLL and a slew-rate-controlled output buffer", 2002 VLSI Symposium: thesis number 9-1

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0011]

An object of the present invention is to provide a DLL circuit with a small minimum delay time. Other object of the present invention is to provide a DLL circuit with a small minimum delay time while allowing a wide range adjustment of the delay time.

[0012]

Hereinafter, means for solving the problems will be described using numerals and characters that will be employed in [embodiments]. These numbers and characters are added to clarify the correspondence relationship between description of [claims] and description of the [embodiments]. The added numbers and characters must not be used for interpretation of technical scopes of inventions set forth in the [claims].

[0013]

A DLL circuit according to the present invention includes:

a first delay circuit for delaying an input clock signal (CLK1) to output a plurality of delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N);

a first selector (7) for selecting a first delayed clock signal (CLK_E) and a second delayed clock signal (CLK_O) from among the plurality of delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N);

a second delay circuit (3) for delaying the input clock signal (CLK1) to generate a slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD);

a second selector (4) for selecting two selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO) from among the slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD), first delayed clock signal (CLK_E), and second delayed clock signal (CLK_O), for output; and

a delay synthesis circuit (5) for generating an internal clock signal (CLK_{IN}) from the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO), for output. Since the slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) described above is generated without invention of the first selector (7), it is possible to reduce a delay time from the input clock signal (CLK1). The DLL circuit can generate the internal clock signal (CLK_{IN}) using this slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD). Thus, its minimum delay time can be reduced.

[0014]

This configuration is effective in a case where the delay time during which the slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) is generated from the input clock signal (CLK1) is shorter than sum of a delay time during which the first delayed clock signal (CLK_E or CLK_O) is generated

from the input clock signal (CLK1) and a delay time of the first selector (7).

[0015]

More specifically, the configuration described above is effective
 5 in the case where, if the slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) is set to include M slightly delayed clock signals, in which M is an integer of at least one, $M + 2$ is smaller than the number N of the plurality of delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N). The DLL circuit described above can extend
 10 a range that can be assumed by the slew rate, by increasing the number of the delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N). On the other hand, when the number of the delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N) is increased, the delay time of the first selector (7) increases. Then, if the first selector (7) is used, the minimum delay time cannot be reduced. The configuration described above can generate the internal clock signal (CLK_{IN}) by using
 15 the slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) generated without the medium of the first selector (7), so that it can reduce the minimum delay time.

[0016]

The first delay circuit (6_1 to 6_N) can include first to Nth delay elements connected in series. In this case, the input clock signal
 20 (CLK1) is supplied to the input terminal of the first delay element (6_1), and the output terminal of the i th delay element (6_i), where i is an arbitrary natural number not more than $N - 1$, is connected to the input terminal of the $(i + 1)$ th delay element (6_{i+1}). The first selector (7) selects the clock signals (T_m , T_{m+1}) output from the output terminal of
 25 the m th delay element (6_m), in which m is a number selected from among

natural numbers of at least one and not more than $N - 1$, and the output terminal of the $(m + 1)$ th delay element (6_{m+1}), respectively, as the first delayed clock signal (CLK_E) and the second delayed clock signal (CLK_O).

5 [0017]

In this case, it is ideal that the delay time during which the slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) is generated from the input clock signal (CLK1) be shorter than the sum of the delay time of the first delay element (6_1) and the delay time of the first selector (7).

10 [0018]

The number of slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD) is not limited to one. The number of the slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD) can be M , in which M is an integer of at least one.

[0019]

15 When the second delay circuit (3) includes first to m th delay devices (3_1 to 3_M ; $M = 2$) that generate the slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD) from the input clock signal (CLK1), respectively, it is ideal that the delay times of the second to N th delay elements (6_2 to 6_N) included in the first delay circuit (6_1 to 6_N) be identical, and using a delay time $Td2$ of the first delay element (6_1), a delay time $Td3$ of the first selector (7),
20 and delay times $Td5$ of the second to N th delay elements (6_2 to 6_N), a delay time td_j of the j th delay device among the first to M th delay devices ($3_1, 3_2$) in the second delay circuit (3), where j is an arbitrary natural number equal to or less than M , be expressed by:

25 $td_j = Td2 + Td3 - j \cdot Td5.$

This makes a difference between the delay times of the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO) always fixed at T_{d5} , which is desirable in terms of simplification of the design of the delay synthesis circuit.

[0020]

5 A DLL circuit according to the present invention includes:

an input buffer (1) for receiving an external clock signal (CLK_{EX}) and then generating an input clock signal (CLK_1);

a first delay circuit (6_1 to 6_N) for delaying the input clock signal (CLK_1) to output a plurality of delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N);

10 a first selector (7) for selecting a first delayed clock signal (CLK_E) and a second delayed clock signal (CLK_O) from among the plurality of delayed clock signals (T_1 to T_N);

a second delay circuit (3) for delaying the input clock signal (CLK_1) to generate a first slightly delayed clock signal ($CLKD$);

15 a third delay circuit (3') for delaying the external clock signal (CLK_{EX}) to generate a second slightly delayed clock signal ($CLKD'$);

a second selector (4) for selecting two selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO) from among the first slightly delayed clock signal ($CLKD$), the second slightly delayed clock signal ($CLKD'$), the first
20 delayed clock signal (CLK_E), and the second delayed clock signal (CLK_O); and

a delay synthesis circuit (5) for synthesizing an internal clock signal (CLK_{IN}) from the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO). When the input buffer (1) that receives the external clock signal (CLK_{EX}) and
25 reproduces its waveform in order to generate the input clock signal

(CLK1) is employed, the DLL circuit can further reduce the minimum delay time.

[0021]

When this configuration is adopted, it is preferable that the delay
 5 time during which the first slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) is
 generated from the input clock signal (CLK1) is shorter than the sum of
 the delay time in which the first delayed clock signal (CLK_E or
 CLK_O) is generated from the input clock signal (CLK1) and the delay
 time of the first selector (7). It is preferable that the delay time during
 10 which the second slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD') is generated
 from the external clock signal (CLK_{EX}) is shorter than the sum of the
 delay time of the input buffer (1) and the delay time during which the
 first slightly delayed clock signal (CLKD) is generated from the input
 clock signal (CLK1).

15 [0022]

The first delay circuit (6_1 to 6_N) can be configured by including
 first to n th delay elements (6_1 to 6_N) connected in series. The input
 clock signal (CLK1) is supplied to the input terminal of the first delay
 element (6_1). The output terminal of the i th delay element (6_i), where i
 20 is an arbitrary natural number not more than $N - 1$, is connected to the
 input terminal of the $(i + 1)$ th delay element (6_{i+1}). The first selector
 (7) selects the clock signals (T_m , T_{m+1}) output from the output terminal
 of the m th delay element (6_m), where m is a number selected from among
 natural numbers of at least one and not more than $N - 1$, and the output
 25 terminal of the $(m + 1)$ th delay element (6_{m+1}), respectively, for output,

as the first delayed clock signal (CLK_E) and the second delayed clock signal (CLK_O).

[0023]

The number of first slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD) and the
 5 number of second slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD') are not limited to one. When the number of the first slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD) is set to M, where M is an integer of at least one, and when the number of the second slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD') is set to M', where M' is an integer of at least one, it is ideal that the delay times of
 10 the second to Nth delay elements (6_2 to 6_N) be identical. The second delay circuit (3) may include first to Mth delay devices (3_1 to 3_M ; $M = 2$) for respectively generating the first slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD). The third delay circuit (3') may include first to M'th slight delay devices ($3_1'$ to $3_{M'}'$; $M' = 2$) for respectively generating the second
 15 slightly delayed clock signals (CLKD). It is ideal that a delay time td_j of the jth delay device (3_j) among the first to the Mth delay devices (3_1 to 3_M), where j is a natural number equal to or less than M, and a delay time td_k of the kth slight delay device ($3_k'$) among the first to M'th slight delay devices, where k is a natural number equal to or less than M' be
 20 expressed by following formulas, using a delay time Td1 of the input buffer (1), a delay time Td2 of the first delay element (6_1), a delay time Td3 of the first selector (7), and delay times Td5 of the second to Nth delay elements (6_2 to 6_N):

$$td_j = Td2 + Td3 - j \cdot Td5,$$

$$25 \quad td_k = Td1 + Td2 + Td3 - (M + k) \cdot Td5.$$

This makes a difference between the delay times of the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO) always fixed at T_{d5} , which is desirable, in terms of simplification of the design of the delay synthesis circuit.

[0024]

5 In the DLL circuit, it is ideal that the delay synthesis circuit (5) generate the internal clock signal (CLK_{IN}) from the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO) for output so that a rise timing of the internal clock signal (CLK_{IN}) is between rise timings of the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO), and a fall timing of the internal clock signal
10 (CLK_{IN}) is between fall timings of the selected clock signals (FDLE, FDLO).

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows a DLL circuit in an embodiment of the present invention;

15 Fig. 2 shows a configuration of a delay synthesis circuit 5;

Fig. 3 is a timing chart showing an operation of the DLL circuit in this embodiment;

Fig. 4 shows a first variation of the DLL circuit in this embodiment;

20 Fig. 5 is a timing chart showing an operation of the first variation of the DLL circuit in this embodiment;

Fig. 6 shows a second variation of the DLL circuit in this embodiment;

25 Fig. 7 shows a third variation of the DLL circuit in this embodiment;

Fig. 8 shows a conventional DLL circuit; and

Fig. 9 is a timing chart showing an operation of the conventional DLL circuit.

PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

5 [0025]

As is shown in Fig. 1, an embodiment of the present invention is a DLL circuit that delays an external clock signal CLK_{EX} supplied from its outside by a desired delay time to generate an internal clock signal CLK_{IN} . The DLL circuit includes an input buffer 1, a delay selection
10 circuit 2, a delay device 3, a selector 4, and a delay synthesis circuit 5.

[0026]

The input buffer 1 reproduces the waveform of the external clock signal CLK_{EX} supplied to its input terminal to generate a clock signal $CLK1$. The input buffer 1 outputs the clock signal $CLK1$ to the delay
15 selection circuit 2. The clock signal $CLK1$ is input to the delay selection circuit 2.

[0027]

The delay selection circuit 2 delays the clock signal $CLK1$ to generate two clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O . The delay time of the
20 delay selection circuit 2 (i.e. the delay time during which the clock signal CLK_E is generated from the clock signal $CLK1$ and the delay time during which the clock signal CLK_O is generated from the clock signal $CLK1$) is adjustable. The delay selection circuit 2 plays a role in coarsely adjusting the delay time of the DLL circuit.

25 [0028]

The delay selection circuit 2 includes a plurality of delay elements 6_1 to 6_N connected in series and a selector 7. The delay elements 6_1 to 6_N are delay circuits used for generating a plurality of clock signals T_1 to T_N having mutually different phases from the clock signal CLK1. The clock signal CLK1 supplied to the delay selection circuit 2 is input to the input terminal of the delay element 6_1 in the first stage. The output terminal of the delay element 6_1 is coupled to the input terminal of the delay element 6_2 in the second stage, and the delay element 6_2 delays the clock signal T_1 generated by the delay element 6_1 to output the clock signal T_2 . Likewise, the output terminal of the delay element 6_i in an i th stage is connected to the delay element 6_{i+1} in an $(i+1)$ th stage, and the delay element 6_{i+1} in the $(i+1)$ th stage delays the clock signal T_i output from the delay element 6_i in the i th stage to output the clock signal T_{i+1} , where i is an integer of at least one and not more than $N-1$. In order to reproduce the waveform of the signal input to the delay selection circuit 2 for output, a buffer is employed as the delay element 6_1 in the first stage. For this reason, hereinafter, the delay element 6_1 will be sometimes described as a buffer 6_1 . The clock signals T_1 to T_N that the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N output, respectively, are input to the selector 7.

[0029]

The selector 7 selects the clock signals T_m and T_{m+1} generated by the two adjacent delay elements 6_m and 6_{m+1} , where m is a natural number not more than $N-1$, from among the clock signals T_1 to T_N respectively output from the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N , and outputs them

as the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O. One of the delay elements 6_m and 6_{m+1} is the delay element in an even-numbered stage, while the other is the delay element in an odd-numbered stage. Of the clock signals T_m and T_{m+1} , the clock signal CLK_E is the clock signal generated by the
5 delay element in the even-numbered stage, while the clock signal CLK_O is the clock signal generated by the delay element in the odd-numbered stage. When the clock signals T_1 and T_2 are selected by the selector 7, for example, the clock signal T_1 is output as the clock signal CLK_O, and the clock signal T_2 is output as the clock signal CLK_E.
10 On the other hand, when the clock signals T_2 and T_3 are selected by the selector 7, the clock signal T_2 is output as the clock signal CLK_E, and the clock signal T_3 is output as the clock signal CLK_O. Which ones of the clock signals T_1 to T_N are selected as the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O is controlled by a controller not shown.

15 [0030]

The number N of the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N included in the delay selection circuit 2 determines the extent of an adjustable range of the delay time of the DLL circuit. In order to extend the adjustable range of the delay time of the DLL circuit, a lot of the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N
20 are used. Typically, the number N of the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N is 128. Since the number N of the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N is large, the delay time of the selector 7 is comparatively large.

[0031]

The clock signal CLK1 output from the input buffer 1 described
25 above is also input to the input terminal of the delay device 3. The

delay device 3 delays the clock signal CLK1 to generate a clock signal CLKD.

[0032]

A delay time t_d of the delay device 3 is shorter than the sum of a
 5 delay time T_{d2} of the delay element 6₁ in the first stage of the delay
 selection circuit 2 and a delay time T_{d3} of the selector 7. The sum of
 the delay time T_{d2} of the delay element 6₁ and the delay time T_{d3} of the
 selector 7 is the minimum delay time that can be assumed by the delay
 selection circuit 2. Thus, the delay time t_d of the delay device 3 is
 10 shorter than the minimum delay time of the delay selection circuit 2.

[0033]

Since the clock signal CLKD is generated without the medium of
 the selector 7 having a large delay time, the delay time from the external
 clock signal CLK_{EX} to the clock signal CLKD can be reduced.

15 [0034]

The clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O output from the selector 7
 in the delay selection circuit 2 and the clock signal CLKD output from
 the delay device 3 are input to the respective three input terminals of the
 selector 4. The selector 4 has two output terminals and selectively
 20 outputs two of the clock signals CLKD, CLK_E, and CLK_O. One of
 the clock signals CLKD and CLK_E is output as a clock signal FDLE,
 and the clock signal CLK_O is selected as a clock signal FDLO and
 output. The number of the input terminals of the selector 4 is three,
 which is small. Thus, the delay time of the selector 4 is extremely
 25 short as compared with the delay time of the selector 7 of the delay

selection circuit 2, and is a practically ignorable level.

[0035]

The delay synthesis circuit 5 is an analog circuit for synthesizing the clock signals FDLO and FDLE output from the selector 4 to generate the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} . More specifically, the delay synthesis circuit 5 generates the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} for output so that a rise timing of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is between rise timings of the clock signal FDLO and the clock signal FDLE and a fall timing of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is between fall timings of the clock signal FDLO and the clock signal FDLE.

[0036]

The internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is generated in response to bias voltages BIASE and BIASO indicating a synthesis ratio R of the clock signal FDLE to the clock signal FDLO, where $0 \leq R \leq 1$. The synthesis ratio R is a parameter that determines the delay time of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} (or the delay time of the DLL circuit). When the delay times of the clock signals FDLO and FDLE from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} are indicated by T_a and T_b , respectively, the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is generated so that a delay time T_{DLL} of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} is expressed by the following equation:

$$T_{DLL} = T_a + (T_b - T_a) * R \quad \dots(1)$$

The synthesis ratio R sometimes represents that the clock signal FDLE is synthesized at a rate of $100 \times R$ (%), and the clock signal FDLO is synthesized at a rate of $100 \times (1 - R)$ %. The synthesis ratio R of one,

for example, can represent that the clock signal FDLE is synthesized at the rate of 100 (%), and the clock signal FDLO is synthesized at the rate of 0 (%).

[0037]

5 The bias potentials BIASO and BIASE are supplied to the delay synthesis circuit 5 after being determined to indicate the desired synthesis ratio R by the controller. The delay synthesis circuit 5 functions to finely adjust the delay time of the DLL circuit.

[0038]

10 Fig. 2 shows an example of a circuit diagram of the delay synthesis circuit 5. This figure is identical to the structure described in the reference (Nonpatent Document 1). The delay synthesis circuit 5 includes inverters 11 to 14, N-channel MOSFETs (Metal Oxide Semiconductor Field Effect Transistors) 15 and 16, a NAND gate 17, P-
15 channel MOSFETs 18 and 19, N-channel MOSFETs 20 and 21, and a P-channel MOSFET 22. The clock signals FDLO and FDLE are supplied to the input terminals of the inverters 12 and 11, respectively. The output terminal of the inverter 11 is connected to the gate of the N-channel MOSFET 15 through the inverter 13, while the output terminal
20 of the inverter 12 is connected to the gate of the N-channel MOSFET 16 through the inverter 14. The output terminals of the inverters 11 and 12 are also connected to the input terminals of the NAND gate 17. The output terminal of the NAND gate 17 is connected to the gates of the P-channel MOSFETs 18 and 19. The sources of the P-channel MOSFETs
25 18 and 19 are connected to power supply terminals 23 and 24 having

power supply potentials, respectively. The drains of the P-channel MOSFETs 18 and 19 are connected to the drains of the N-channel MOS transistors 15 and 16, respectively. The sources of the N-channel MOS transistors 15 and 16 are connected to ground terminals 25 and 26 having
5 ground potentials. The drains of the N-channel MOS transistors 15 and 16 are further connected to the sources of the N-channel MOS transistors 20 and 21, respectively. The bias potentials BIASE and BIASO, which were already described, are supplied to the gates of the N-channel MOS transistors 20 and 21, respectively. The drains of the N-channel MOS
10 transistors 20 and 21 are connected to the drain of the P-channel MOS transistor 22. The gate of the P-channel MOS transistor 22 is connected to the output terminal of the NAND gate 17 that was already described. The source of the P-channel MOS transistor 22 is connected to a power supply terminal 27 having the power supply potential. The
15 internal clock CLK_{IN} is output from the output terminal connected to the drains of the N-channel MOS transistors 20 and 21.

CLK is inverted to be used through an inverter as not shown. A loading element, for example a resistor, can be connected unparallel with P-channel MOS transistor 22. Fig. 3 shows under this condition.

20 [0039]

Referring to Fig. 1, the DLL circuit in this embodiment is set to a state where it has a desired delay time by following operations (or set to the state where it has a desired delay time), so that the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is generated from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} .

25 [0040]

The external clock signal CLK_{EX} is input to the input buffer 1 to generate the clock signal $CLK1$. The clock signal $CLK1$ is input to the delay selection circuit 2 to be used for generation of the clock signals T_1 to T_N inside the delay selection circuit 2. The clock signal $CLK1$ is also input to the delay circuit 3 to generate the clock signal $CLKD$.

[0041]

The controller (not shown) determines a desired value for the delay time of the DLL circuit. When the DLL circuit is applied to a synchronous DRAM that outputs data in synchronization with the external clock signal CLK_{EX} , for example, a desired value for the delay time from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} to the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is determined so that the sum of the delay time from the external clock CLK_{EX} to the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} and the delay time of a circuit that outputs the data in synchronization with the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} matches the period of the external clock signal CLK_{EX} .

[0042]

In response to the desired value for the delay time, the controller generates a control signal indicating which ones of the clock signals T_1 to T_N should be output as the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O , and outputs the control signal to the selector 7 of the delay selection circuit 2. The selector 7 outputs the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O , in response to the control signal.

[0043]

Further, the controller determines which ones of the clock signals $CLKD$, CLK_E , and CLK_O should be output as the clock signals $FDLO$

and FDLE, in response to the desired value for the delay time.

[0044]

Further, the controller generates the bias voltages BIASE and BIASO indicating the synthesis ratio R for the clock signal FDLE and
 5 the clock signal FDLO, in response to the determined desired value for the delay time. The delay synthesis circuit 5 synthesizes the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} from the clock signals FDLO and FDLE, in response to the bias voltages BIASE and BIASO.

[0045]

10 When the desired value for the delay time of the DLL circuit is large, the clock signals output from the delay elements close to the delay element 6_N in the last stage are selected by the selector 7 as the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O , and the clock signals CLK_O and CLK_E are selected by the selector 4 as the clock signals FDLO and FDLE,
 15 respectively. More specifically, when the clock signals that will be selected are denoted the clock signals T_m and T_{m+1} , and the desired value for the delay time is large, the clock signals T_m and T_{m+1} are selected so that m becomes large. This makes the delay times from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} to the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O longer,
 20 thereby increasing the delay time of the DLL circuit. By increasing the number N of the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N , the maximum value of the delay time of the DLL circuit can be increased.

[0046]

On the other hand, when the desired value for the delay time of
 25 the DLL circuit is small, the clock signals output from the delay

elements close to the delay element 6_1 in the first stage are selected by the selector 7 as the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O. This makes the delay times from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} to the clock signals CLK_E and CLK_O shorter, thereby reducing the delay time of the DLL
5 circuit.

[0047]

In order to make the delay time of the DLL circuit closer to the minimum delay time of the DLL circuit, the clock signals T_1 and T_2 are selected as the clock signals CLK_O and CLK_E, respectively. Further,
10 the clock signal CLKD supplied from the delay device 3 and the clock signal CLK_O supplied from the delay selection circuit 2 are selected as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO, respectively. This makes the delay times from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} to the clock signals FDLE and FDLO shorter, thereby further reducing the delay time of the DLL
15 circuit.

[0048]

In order to minimize the delay time of the DLL circuit, the synthesis ratio R of the clock signal FDLE to the clock signal FDLO is set to one, further; that is, the clock signal FDLE is synthesized at a rate
20 of 100%, and the clock signal FDLO is synthesized at a rate of 0% to generate the internal clock signal CLK_{IN}.

[0049]

Since the DLL circuit in this embodiment, which performs the above operations, can generate the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} by using
25 the clock signal CLKD, its minimum delay time is small. Fig. 3 is a

timing chart of the DLL circuit showing the operation of minimizing its delay time. When the delay time of the DLL circuit is minimized, the clock signal CLKD is selected as the clock signal FDLE. Further, by setting the synthesis ratio R to one, the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is purely generated from the clock signal FDLE. Accordingly, the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} has substantially the same waveform as the clock signal CLKD, including its substantially the same rise and fall timings as those of the clock signal CLKD. Moreover, since the clock signal CLKD is generated without the medium of the selector 7 having a large delay time, the delay time from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} to the clock signal CLKD is short. Accordingly, the DLL circuit in this embodiment can generate the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} so that its minimum delay time becomes small.

[0050]

A minimum delay time T_{dmin} of the DLL circuit in this embodiment is expressed by the following equation:

$$T_{dmin} = T_{d1} + t_d,$$

in which T_{d1} indicates the delay time of the input buffer 1, while t_d indicates the delay time of the delay device 3. Since the delay times of the selector 4 and the delay synthesis circuit 5 are extremely short, they are ignored in this examination. As already mentioned, since the delay time t_d of the delay device 3 is shorter than the sum of the delay time T_{d2} of the delay element 6, and the delay time T_{d3} of the selector 7, the following formula holds:

$$T_{dmin} < T_{d1} + T_{d2} + T_{d3} \quad \dots (2)$$

[0051]

The following examination corroborates that the DLL circuit in this embodiment can reduce the minimum delay time more than the conventional DLL circuit in Fig. 8. Fig. 9 is a timing chart showing the operation of the conventional DLL circuit to minimize its delay time. In order for the conventional DLL circuit to minimize its delay time, the clock signals T1 and T2 are selected as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO, respectively, and the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is generated from the clock signals FDLO and FDLE.

10 [0052]

A minimum delay time T_{dmin}' of the conventional DLL circuit is expressed by:

$$T_{dmin}' = T_{d1}' + T_{d2}' + T_{d3}',$$

in which T_{d1}' indicates the delay time of an input buffer 101, T_{d2}' indicates the delay time of a delay element 104₁, T_{d3}' indicates the delay time of a selector 105. If elements having same characteristics as the input buffer 1, delay element 6₁, and selector 7 are used as the input buffer 101, delay element 104₁, and selector 105, respectively, the minimum delay time T_{dmin}' of the conventional DLL circuit is the sum of T_{d1} , T_{d2} , and T_{d3} . As seen from Formula (2), the DLL circuit in this embodiment can make the minimum delay time T_{dmin} smaller than the minimum delay time T_{dmin}' of the conventional DLL circuit.

[0053]

As described above, the DLL circuit in this embodiment can reduce its minimum delay time by using the clock signal CLKD to

generate the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} while enabling to increase the adjustable range of the delay time by increasing the number N of the delay elements 6_1 to 6_N .

[0054]

5 In this embodiment, it is ideal that the respective delay times of the delay elements 6_2 to 6_N be all set to $Td5$, and the delay time td of the delay device 3 be set to satisfy the following equation:

$$td = Td2 + Td3 - Td5 \quad \dots(3)$$

in which $Td2$ indicates the delay time of the delay element 6_1 , while $Td3$
 10 indicates the delay time of the selector 7. By setting the delay times of the delay device 3 and the delay elements 6_2 to 6_N as described above, an interval (difference) between the delay times of the two clock signals $FDLE$ and $FDLO$ supplied to the delay synthesis circuit 5 with respect to the external clock signal CLK_{EX} becomes $Td5$, which is fixed. The
 15 fixed interval between the delay times of the clock signals $FDLE$ and $FDLO$ is preferable since it means that the characteristics of the delay synthesis circuit 5 do not need to be adjusted irrespective of which ones of the clock signals will be selected as the clock signals $FDLE$ and $FDLO$. The fixed interval between the delay times of the clock signals
 20 $FDLE$ and $FDLO$ is also preferable in that generation of the bias voltages $BIASO$ and $BIASE$ can be facilitated by the controller.

[0055]

In order to further reduce the minimum delay time of the DLL circuit in this embodiment, addition of a delay device 3', as shown in Fig.
 25 4, is ideal. The delay device 3' receives the external clock signal

CLK_{EX} without the medium of the input buffer 1, delays the external clock signal CLK_{EX}, and then generates a clock signal CLKD'. A delay time td' of the delay device 3' is set to be shorter than the sum of the delay time Td1 of the input buffer 1 and the delay time td of the delay device 3. The selector 4 outputs two of the clock signals CLKD', CLKD, CLK_E, and CLK_O as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO. In order to minimize the delay time of the DLL circuit in Fig. 4, the clock signals CLKD' and CLKD are selected as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO to generate the internal clock signal CLK_{IN}, as shown in Fig. 5. By using the clock signal CLKD' of which the delay time from the external clock signal CLK_{EX} is further shorter for generation of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN}, the minimum delay time of the DLL circuit can be further reduced.

[0056]

When the delay device 3' is added, it is ideal that the respective delay times of the delay elements 6₂ to 6_N be all set to Td5, the delay time td of the delay device 3 be set according to the above Equation (3), and the delay time td' of the delay device 3' be set to satisfy:

$$td' = Td1 + Td2 + Td3 - 2 \cdot Td5 \quad \dots(4)$$

Determination of the delay times as described above makes the interval (difference) between the delay times of the two clock signals FDLE and FDLO supplied to the delay synthesis circuit 5 with respect to the external clock signal CLK_{EX} fixed at Td5, which is preferable for the same reason as in the foregoing description.

[0057]

Further, in this embodiment, a plurality of clock signals CLKD can be used for generation of the internal clock signal CLK_{EX}, as shown in Fig. 6.

A plurality of delay devices 3 is interposed between the output terminal of the input buffer 1 and the selector 4 in order to generate the clock signals CLKD. The delay times of the delay devices 3 with respect to the external clock CLK_{EX} are selected so that the delay times of the clock signals CLKD are all shorter than the sum of the delay time Td2 of the delay element 6₁ in the first stage of the delay selection circuit 2 and the delay time Td3 of the selector 7 and are also mutually different. In the DLL circuit in Fig. 6, two delay devices 3 are employed for generating two clock signals CLKD₁ and CLKD₂, respectively. The clock signals CLKD and the delay devices 3 for generating those are differentiated according to subscripts 1 and 2.

15 [0058]

When the configuration in Fig. 6 is adopted, the operation of the DLL circuit is modified as follows: the clock signals CLKD generated by the delay devices 3 are input to the selector 4. The selector 4 selects two from among the clock signals CLK_O and CLK_E sent from the delay selection circuit 2 and the clock signals CLKD as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO, and the delay synthesis circuit 5 generates the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} from the clock signals FDLE and FDLO. When the delay time of the DLL circuit is to be reduced, two of the clock signals CLKD are selected as the clock signals FDLE and FELO.

25 [0059]

The configuration in Fig. 6 is ideal in that the range of the delay time that the DLL circuit can assume can be extended when the delay time is small.

[0060]

5 The number of the clock signals CLK generated and the number of the delay devices 3 are not limited to two. However, when the number of the clock signals CLKD is increased, the delay time of the selector 4 increases, so that the minimum delay time cannot be reduced. For this reason, the configuration in Fig. 6 is effective in a case where the
10 number of the input terminals of the selector 4 is smaller than the number of the input terminals of the selector 7 included in the delay selection circuit 2. It is especially effective in the case where the number of the input terminals of the selector 4 is extremely smaller than the number of the input terminals of the selector 7.

15 [0061]

When the configuration in Fig. 6 is adopted, it is ideal that the respective delay times of the delay elements 6_2 to 6_N be all set to $Td5$, and when M is set to the number of the delay devices 3, a delay time td_j of the delay device 3_j be set to satisfy:

20 $td_j = Td2 + Td3 - j \cdot Td5,$

in which j is a natural number equal to or less than M . Setting the delay times as described above is preferable, because the interval (difference) between the delay times of the two clock signals FDLE and FDLO supplied to the delay synthesis circuit 5 is thereby fixed at $Td5$.

25 [0062]

Moreover, a plurality of clock signals CLKD' can be generated from the external clock signal CLK_{EX}, and the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} can be generated from the clock signals CLKD', as shown in Fig. 7. The clock signals CLKD' in Fig. 7 are differentiated according to the superscripts 1 and 2. More specifically, in the configuration in Fig. 7, the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} is generated using clock signals CLKD₁' and CLKD₂' generated by delay devices 3₁' and 3₂', respectively.

[0063]

At this point, it is possible that a plurality of the clock signals CLKD are generated from the clock signal CLK₁ and the plurality of the clock signals CLKD are used for generation of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN}. Fig. 7 shows the configuration where a plurality of the clock signals, which are CLKD₁ and CLKD₂, are used for generation of the internal clock signal CLK_{IN}.

[0064]

The delay times of the delay devices 3 and 3' are selected so that the delay times of the clock signals CLKD and CLKD' with respect to the external clock signal CLK_{EX} are shorter than the sum of the delay time Td1 of the input buffer 1, delay time Td2 of the delay element 6₁ in the first stage of the delay selection circuit 2, and the delay time Td3 of the selector 7 and are mutually different.

[0065]

The operation of the DLL circuit in Fig. 7 is modified as follows: the clock signals CLKD and CLKD' generated by the delay devices 3 and 3', respectively, are input to the selector 4. The selector 4 selects two

of the clock signals CLK_O and CLK_E sent from the delay selection circuit 2 and the clock signals CLKD and CLKD' as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO, and the delay synthesis circuit 5 generates the internal clock signal CLK_{IN} from the clock signals FDLE and FDLO. When the delay time of the DLL circuit is reduced, two of the clock signals CLKD and CLKD' are selected as the clock signals FDLE and FDLO.

[0066]

The configuration in Fig. 7 is ideal in that the minimum delay time can be further reduced and at the same time the range of the delay time that the DLL circuit can assume can be extended when the delay time is small.

[0067]

When the configuration in Fig. 7 is adopted, it is ideal that the delay time of the delay device 3' having the shortest delay time among the delay devices 3' be shorter than the sum of the delay time Td1 of the input buffer 1 and the delay time of the delay device 3 having the shortest delay time among the delay devices 3. This makes it possible to further reduce the minimum delay time of the DLL circuit.

[0068]

Further, it is ideal that the delay time of an arbitrary delay device 3' be shorter than the sum of the delay time Td1 of the input buffer 1 and the delay time of the delay device 3 having the shortest delay time among the delay devices 3. This makes it possible to further reduce the minimum delay time and at the same time to further extend the range of the delay time that the DLL circuit can assume when the delay time is

small.

[0069]

In this case, it is ideal that the respective delay times of the delay elements 6_2 to 6_N be all set to $Td5$ and respective delay times td_j and td_k' of the delay devices 3_j and $3_k'$ be set to satisfy:

$$td_j = Td2 + Td3 - j \cdot Td5 \quad \dots(5)$$

$$td_k' = Td1 + Td2 + Td3 - (M + k) \cdot Td5 \quad \dots(6)$$

in which j is a natural number equal to or less than the number M of the delay devices 3 , and k is a natural number equal to or less than the number M' of the delay devices $3'$. In the configuration in Fig. 7, for example, the delay time td_1 of the delay device 3_1 and the delay time td_2 of the delay device 3_2 are set to satisfy:

$$td_1 = Td2 + Td3 - Td5$$

$$td_2 = Td2 + Td3 - 2 \cdot Td5.$$

Then, the delay time td_1' of the delay device $3_1'$ and the delay time td_2' of the delay device $3_2'$ are set to satisfy:

$$td_1' = Td1 + Td2 + Td3 - 3 \cdot Td5$$

$$td_2' = Td1 + Td2 + Td3 - 4 \cdot Td5.$$

Setting the delay times as described above is preferable, because the interval (difference) between the delay times of the two clock signals $FDLE$ and $FDLO$ supplied to the delay synthesis circuit 5 with respect to the external clock signal CLK_{EX} is thereby fixed at $Td5$.

[0070]

In the configuration in Fig. 7, the number of the generated clock signals $CLKD$ and $CLKD'$ and the number of the delay devices 3 and $3'$

are not limited to two. However, if the total number of the clock signals CLKD and CLKD' is increased, the delay time of the selector 4 increases, so that the minimum delay time cannot be reduced. For this reason, the configuration in Fig. 7 is effective in the case where the number of the input terminals of the selector 4 is smaller than the number of the input terminals of the selector 7 included in the delay selection circuit 2. It is especially effective in the case where the number of the input terminals of the selector 4 is extremely smaller than the number of the input terminals of the selector 7.

10 [0071]

The meritorious effects of the present invention are summarized as follows.

The present invention provides a DLL circuit with a small minimum delay time.

15 The present invention also provides a DLL circuit with a small minimum delay time while allowing a wide range of adjustment of the delay time.

It should be noted that other objects, features and aspects of the present invention will become apparent in the entire disclosure and that modifications may be done without departing the gist and scope of the present invention as disclosed herein and claimed as appended herewith.

20 Also it should be noted that any combination of the disclosed and/or claimed elements, matters and/or items may fall under the modifications aforementioned.